

Message Text

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R 311847Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 302
INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL NAPLES
AMCONSUL PALERMO
AMCONSUL TRIEST
AMCONSUL TURIN

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E.O. 11652: NA
TAGS: PINT, IT
SUBJ: CATHOLIC HIERARCHY REAFFIRMS ITS OPPOSITION OF MARXISM

1. A STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE, ISSUED ON JANUARY 26, STRONGLY RECONFIRMED THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM. THE BISHOPS STATED THAT DESPITE A FEW ENCOURAGING ACTIONS BY ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI) SECRETARY BERLINGUER, SUCH AS HIS LETTER TO BISHOP BATTAZZI, THERE IS NO WAY TO RECONCILE MARXISM AND COMMUNISM WITH CATHOLICISM. THE BISHOPS SAID THAT QUOTE VERBAL ASSURANCES ARE NOT SUFFICIENT TO MAKE US FORGET THE VERIFIABLE EXPERIENCES THAT HAVE OCCURRED WHERE MARXIST REGIMES HAVE IMPOSED THEIR DOCTRINES. THE CHURCH HAS SEEN NO ACTUAL CHANGES IN COMMUNISM, PARTICULARLY AT THE IDEOLOGICAL LEVEL. END QUOTE.

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2. THE BISHOPS ALSO CAME OUT STRONGLY AGAINST ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND REAFFIRMED ITS OPPOSITION TO ALL GROUPS THAT THREATEN THE COMMON GOOD SOLELY FOR THEIR OWN ADVANTAGE. IN THIS CATEGORY THEY PUT VIOLENT POLITICAL OR SOCIAL ACTIVITY, VIOLENT CRIME, DRUG DEALING, AND PORNOGRAPHY. THE CONFERENCE ALSO VOICED CONTINUING CONCERN

ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF THE DECENTRALIZATION LAW 382 (ROME 18039) WHICH TRANSFERS BROAD CONTROL OF FUNDING OF EDUCATION, SCHOOLS, HEALTH CARE AND PUBLIC ASSISTANCE FROM THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT TO THE REGIONS, MANY OF WHICH HAVE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENTS. THE BISHOPS ARE EVIDENTLY WORRIED THAT SOME LOCAL GOVERNMENTS WILL REDUCE OR ELIMINATE GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR RELIGIOUSLY OPERATED INSTITUTIONS. THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT THE PCI WILL TAKE COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE SCHOOLS, WHICH THEY FEEL IS THE BEGINNING OF THE COLLECTIVIZATION OF THE SOCIETY AND THE END OF THE FREE EXPRESSION OF IDEAS.

5. COMMENT. THE ITALIAN BISHOPS HAVE NOT EMBARKED ON ANY NEW GROUND. THEIR DECISION TO SPEAK OUT AGAIN FORECFULLY AT THIS TIME THEREFORE APPEARS DESIGNED TO MAKE THEIR OPPOSITION TO COMMUNISM (AND FURTHER PCI POLITICAL ADVANCEMENT) FELT AT A CRITICAL POLITICAL MOMENT. ALTHOUGH THE BISHOPS DISAVOWED ANY INTENTION TO INTERFERE IN THE ITALIAN POLITICAL PROCESS, THEY CLEARLY STATED THAT POLITICAL ACTIVITY CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM MORAL PRINCIPLES. THE BISHOPS' STATEMENT IS BEING REGARDED HERE AS EVIDENCE OF A MORE POLITICALLY ACTIVE ROLE OF THE ITALIAN CHURCH (IN CONTRAST TO THE VATICAN'S MORE UNIVERSAL AND THEREFORE CAUTIOUS APPROACH). END COMMENDT. GARDNER

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